

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ACCRA 4361

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TAGS: PINT, PGOV, GH

SUBJ: CHIEFS CALL FOR BICAMERAL LEGISLATURE

SUMMARY: HOUSE OF CHIEFS HAS PROPOSED BICAMERAL LEGISLATURE AND IMPORTANT MODIFICATIONSTO CONCEPT OF UNION GOVERNMENT AS SUPPORTED BY GOG. CUMULATIVE EFFECT IS TO MOVE CHIEFS, INCLUDING ASANTEHENE, INTO MORE OPEN OPPOSITION TO ACHEAMPONG. IF HIS SUPPORT IN KEY ASHANTI REGION IS ERODING, PROSPECTS FOR REGIME'S SURVIVAL ARE POOR. END SUMMARY.

1. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, ON JUNE 7 A DELEGATION FROM NATIONAL HOUSE OF CHIEFS PRESENTED A MEMO TO AD HOC COMMITTEE ON UNION GOVERNMENT RECOMMENDING ESTABLISHMENT OF A CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY AND THEN CREATION OF A TWO-TIER LEGISLATURE. CHIEFS CALLED FOR AN UPPER HOUSE, WHICH WOULD INCLUDE HEAD OF STATE, FIVE OFFICERS OF ARMED FORCES, THREE POLICE OFFICERS, HEAD OF PRISONS SERVICE, PRESIDENT OF NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHIEFS, THREE CLERGYMEN AND ONE MEMBER FROM MUSLIM COUNCIL. UPPER HOUSE WOULD SERVE AS A CHECK ON LOWER AND WOULD "HELP ELIMINATE THE PASSAGE OF INIMICAL ACTS UNDER A CERTIFICATE

OF URGENCY AS WAS PART OF OUR GHANAIAAN EXPERIENCE."

2. LOWER HOUSE WOULD BE BASED ON 140 CONSTITUENCIES, IN EACH OF WHICH

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THREE CANDIDATES WOULD BE NOMINATED BY CHIEFS, ELDERS AND TOWN DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEES. ONE CANDIDATE WOULD THEN BE ELECTED BY THE PEOPLE TO SIT IN HOUSE. A CABINET OF SIX TO FIFTEEN MEMBERS WOULD SERVE A PRIME MINISTER, WHO WOULD BE RESPONSIBLE TO LOWER HOUSE. THESE MINISTERS WOULD BE DRAWN PROPORTIONALLY FROM GHANA'S NINE REGIONS.

3. CHIEFS ALSO SUGGESTED THE TERM UNION GOVERNMENT BE CHANGED TO "NATIONAL GOVERNMENT." THEY OPPOSED INCLUSION OF SPECIFIC INTEREST GROUPS PER SE INTO NEW GOVERNMENT, ARGUING THAT BRINGING IN IDENTIFIABLE BODIES (BAR ASSOCIATION, TRADE UNIONS, FARMERS ASSOCIATION, ETC.) SHOULD BE AVOIDED SINCE THESE GROUPS "ARE LIKELY TO POSSESS AND PROJECT SECTIONAL INTERESTS."

4. COMMENT: SINCE CONCEPT OF UNION GOVERNMENT HAS NEVER BEEN DEFINED BY GOG IT IS DIFFICULT TO SAY PRECISELY TO WHAT DEGREE CHIEFS

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PROPOSALS MESH WITH IT. OUR STRONG IMPRESSION, HOWEVER, IS THAT CHIEFS IN GENERAL AND ASANTEHENE IN PARTICULAR ARE NOW MOVING AWAY FROM UNION GOVERNMENT BECAUSE IT IS CLEARLY DESIGNED TO PERPETUATE ACHEAMPONG'S RULE. IN RECENT MONTHS THESE TRADITIONAL LEADERS PUBLICLY BACKED UNION GOVERNMENT ONLY IN PART, SUPPORTING IT (BUT BY EXTENSION ANY OTHER FORM OF GOVERNMENT AS WELL) TO EXTENT IT WOULD PROMOTE NATIONAL UNITY AND PROSPERITY. ASANTEHENE HAS NEVER LENT HIS CONSIDERABLE PRESTIGE TO CONCEPT AND NOW SEEMS TO BE INCREASING HIS DISTANCE FROM IT. AS HEAD OF NATIONAL HOUSE OF CHIEFS, HE IS DIRECTLY ASSOCIATED WITH CHIEFS' MEMO AND MAY BE MOVING INTO MORE OPEN OPPOSITION TO ACHEAMPONG.

5. CHIEFS' SUGGESTION THAT UNION GOVERNMENT BE RENAMED IS A SLAP AT ACHEAMPONG, WHO HAS PUSHED THIS TERM HARD. THEIR OPPOSITION TO INCLUSION OF SPECIFIC INTEREST GROUPS AS SUCH SEEMS TO NEGATE ONE OF THE KEY TENETS OF UNION GOVERNMENT -- THAT PARTY POLITICS IS A GREAT EVIL AND CAN BE AVOIDED ONLY BY LETTING INTEREST GROUPS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES. FINALLY, CHIEFS' PROPOSALS FOR A BICAMERAL LEGISLATURE, IN WHICH PRIME MINISTER

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RATHER THAN HEAD OF STATE WOULD HAVE KEY ROLE, DOES NOT SEEM TO SQUARE VERY WELL WITH THOUGHTS OF CHAIRMAN ACHEAMPONG ON HIS OWN STATUS UNDER UNION GOVERNMENT. (HOWEVER, WE SPECULATE THAT JOE APPIAH, WHO WAS PRESENT AT CEREMONY WHERE MEMO PRESENTED, APPLAUDS THIS IDEA SINCE HE HOPES TO BECOME PRIME MINISTER.)

6. LACKING TEXT OF CHIEFS' MEMO, WE ARE NOT CERTAIN OF ALL ITS DETAILS BUT ON BALANCE NOW CONCLUDE THAT ASANTEHENE AND OTHER CHIEFS ARE BEGINNING TO SIDE WITH ANTI-ACHEAMPONG AND ANTI-UNION GOVERNMENT FORCES. IF ACHEAMPONG'S SUPPORT IN KEY ASHANTI REGION IS EBBING, AS WE SUSPECT, HE WILL FIND IT VERY HARD TO KEEP HIS ACT TOGETHER FOR MUCH LONGER. SMITH

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